

Module: Pivotal Response Training (PRT)

CASE STUDY EXAMPLES

Learner-Initiated Strategies

Step 1. Teaching Social Initiations

Another successful approach to teaching learners with ASD how to initiate interactions with others uses learner initiation training (Carter, 2001; L. K. Koegel et al., 1998; Oke & Schreibman, 1990). With these types of strategies, learners with ASD acquire skills that will help them initiate and maintain interactions with others. Research has demonstrated that learners with ASD can be taught to:

- Use two approach behaviors: sharing (e.g., “Can I play with you?” “Can I have some blocks?”) and play organizing (e.g., “How about if you build a road and I’ll build a bridge?”);
- Take turns choosing activities; and
- Keep trying, even if they are unsuccessful at first.

Learners with ASD are given the opportunity to practice these skills with a team member before using them with typically developing peers. It may be helpful to video record the practice sessions and provide feedback to learners with ASD about how they can improve the use of the skills.

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Step 2. Teaching Question-Asking: “What’s That?”

Learner-initiated strategies also can be used to teach children and youth with ASD skills such as question-asking. One effective procedure is to place learner-preferred items in an opaque bag and prompt the learner to ask, “What’s that?” After the prompted question, the learner is shown what’s inside the bag and allowed access to the item. The prompt is then faded until spontaneous question-asking occurs. The next step is to gradually replace learner-preferred items with neutral items with which the learner is not familiar. Finally, the opaque bag itself is faded, and the learner is able to ask the question “What’s that?” when presented with a new, unknown item (L. K. Koegel et al., 1998).

Step 3. Teaching Question-Asking: “What Happened?” and “What’s Happening?”

Another effective learner-initiated strategy is to teach questions such as “What’s happening?” and “What happened?” by using pop-up books that are related to learner interests. Using this procedure, learners are taught to use one of the questions after they pull the tabs for the pop-up pictures. Research has shown that books of high interest are powerful resources for teaching other self-initiations, including other WH-questions or asking for help (L. K. Koegel, Carter, & Koegel, 2003).

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Step 4. Teaching Language, Communication, and Social Skills Using Naturalistic Techniques

Naturalistic techniques also have been found to be highly effective in providing opportunities for learners with ASD to initiate interactions with others (Hwang & Hughes, 2000). The most consistent component of each of these techniques is that team members' responses are *simple, predictable, and contingent upon the learner's initiations* (McGee, Morrier, & Daly, 1999). Naturalistic techniques used to teach a variety of skills such as language, communication, and social skills include the following:

- *Contingent imitation*: Imitating learners' actions during interactions, play, and other activities;
- *Naturally occurring reinforcement*: Providing learners with an appropriate item after requesting it (e.g., child gets snack after vocalization, learner is provided with help after asking appropriately);
- *Time delay*: Providing a task demand, allowing a time delay for the child to respond independently, followed by a prompt if child doesn't respond; and
- *Environmental arrangements*: Placing preferred items out of reach, for example (Fredeen & Koegel, 2006).